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When Lake County leaders began talking about an intelligent transportation system in 1999, the idea of using computers and cameras to smooth bumps along congested roads seemed a bit farfetched.

Seven years later, the \$6.8 million Lake County PASSAGE is online. From a space-age center in Libertyville, operators monitor a system that automatically changes signals based on traffic volume and other factors and can intervene immediately to make adjustments.

Lake is among the first in the country to use such a system to connect local roads. State routes and the tollway also will be tied in.

The federal government pitched in \$3 million, but was skeptical when newly-elected U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk pushed the matter in Congress beginning in 2000.

"They didn't get it at first," he said last week during the official opening of the center.

"This is one of the most cutting edge, advanced transportation systems in the world," Kirk added. "The old joke about Half Day Road being All Day Road will become part of our memory."

Using technology to tame traffic has almost become a necessity because of a lack of money to widen roads, particularly state routes.

So far, 56 traffic signals are connected to the system, but there are hundreds more to come through the years.

"This is a fine way to spend money to maximize existing revenues," said county board member Steve Carlson of Grandwood Park.

Mayor's move rejected: An attempt by Mundelein Mayor Kenneth H. Kessler to name a trustee as temporary mayor in his absence was recently rejected by the village board.

Kessler wanted veteran Trustee Ray Semple to serve as mayor when needed, but only Trustee Steve "Chip" Cancelli supported the idea during the Feb. 27 board meeting. Without a second trustee's support, the motion could not be called for a vote and it died.

"I think it's people trying to flex their muscles and show me who's in control," Kessler said the next day.

Trustee Terri Voss denied there's a power struggle at the village hall. She said it's up to the board to choose a fill-in mayor, not Kessler. Additionally, the job usually goes to the most senior trustee, who is Jim Nutschnig, she said.

"It's just that simple," Voss said.